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FILE ONLY

Angry now, kin speak out on 7 still held in Lebanon

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When 39 TWA passengers were held hostage in Lebanon last month, their families received twice-daily phone calls from a special 24-hour State Department hostage task force. At one point, President Reagan met personally with several hostage families in Chicago.

No such treatment was afforded the families of the seven Americans who are still held in Lebanon, however. Most of those families now say they were deceived by the U.S. gov-

ernment about attempts to negotiate the release of the seven hostages along with the 39 from the hijacked plane.

They contend, too, that the government relaxed all negotiating efforts the moment the TWA media glare diminished. And all the while, they say, they were pressured to keep silent about the plight of the seven.

Indeed, when the TWA crisis ended June 30, so did the State Department task force. And so, too, did all but intermittent contacts with the State Department, the families complain.

The seven hostages, the families say, have been relegated once again to obscurity.

"Media pressure and public pressure brought 39 hostages home in 17 days," said Peggy Say, the sister of Associated Press correspondent Terry A. Anderson, who was kidnapped in West Beirut on March 15. "The government had been telling us all along that they're working intently. Then we saw with the TWA crisis what intensity really meant. By comparison, our treatment has been pretty shabby."

In an attempt to pressure the administration and Congress, a number of family members will meet in Washington today for a news conference and an informal congressional forum.

One of the organizers of the Washington trip is Jeremy Levin, a Cable News Network correspondent who gained his freedom in February after being held for 11 months in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. It was the decision of Levin's wife, Lucille, to "go public" in October with her criticism of the State Department that later

persuaded the families of six of the seven hostages to end a public silence requested of them by the department.

"Our government negotiated for the 39, and they damn well ought to for the seven," Levin said yesterday. "The whole issue has faded. We're wondering what it takes now to create a [new] hostage crisis."

Unlike the TWA families, the families of the remaining hostages say, they received only occasional State Department phone calls and no letters, telegrams or phone calls from

Reagan before, during or since the TWA crisis. Their repeated requests for a meeting with Reagan were rejected both during the crisis and after, they say.

In separate interviews in recent days, five of the families have detailed lives of frustration and disillusionment punctuated by brief flashes of unfulfilled hope.

(The family of William Buckley, 56, a U.S. Embassy political officer kidnapped on March 16, 1984, has shunned contact with the media and with other hostage families. The family of David Jacobsen, 54, administrator of the American University Hospital in Beirut, kidnapped May 28, could not be reached for comment.)

If one single trait unites the five families, it is their acquired cynicism toward the Reagan administration, which many of them once supported. They say they rarely bother calling the State Department anymore, all the while cringing at each

public hint of retaliation against terrorists by administration officials.

"One by one, each family has fallen as they realize the government's deceit," Say said. "I was a Reagan supporter from way back. I believed in our government. I trusted it. I waved my little red-white-and-blue flag. Now I've lost my illusions."

Some family members say they were told by the State Department during the TWA crisis not to publicly connect the missing seven with the TWA 39 — despite public pronouncements by Reagan and Secretary of State George P. Shultz that the United States was demanding the release of all 46 hostages. A senior State Department official told reporters July 1, the day after the 39 were freed, that publicly linking the two hostage groups "may have been a mistake."

When Carol Weir, the wife of one of the seven hostages, asked about Shultz's statement, she said she was told by the State Department: "Well, you wouldn't want to hold up the release of the 39 just to try to get your husband out, would you?"

"It was quite disturbing to hear George Shultz say we demanded all 46, then have the State Department tell you not to ask for our seven along with the 39 because it would complicate things," Weir said. Her husband, the Rev. Benjamin T. Weir, 60, was kidnapped May 8, 1984, in West Beirut.

Other family members say they were told by the State Department in late-night phone calls two days before the TWA hostages were released that there was hope that the seven would be included. But when Reagan called the TWA hijackers "thugs and murderers and barbarians" on June 28, these family members contend, his comments ended any chance of the seven being included.

"Reagan blew it," said Patty Little, niece of Peter Kilburn, 60, a librarian at the American University of Beirut, who was abducted Dec. 3. "I think they could've gotten them all out if Reagan hadn't opened his mouth. I used to be pretty pro-Reagan. Now I feel like a little girl whose grandfather let her down."

For months, the families heeded the State Department request that they neither speak with the media nor contact one another. They did

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not reveal, for instance, that at least three families had received handwritten letters in the spring from their family members held captive.

Those letters, which almost certainly were dictated by the kidnapers, said the hostages would be hanged unless the families pressured the U.S. to seek release of 17 Shiites imprisoned in Kuwait for attacks on U.S. and French installations. That also was an initial demand of the TWA hijackers and a standing demand of the Islamic extremists who held Levin.

In February, according to one family, the kidnapers passed on a warning that "other catastrophic events will occur" if the Shiites in Kuwait were not released. Andrew Mihelich of Joliet, Ill. — who received the warning in a handwritten letter from his kidnapped uncle, the Rev. Lawrence Jenco — said he believed that the TWA hijacking was one of the "catastrophic events" predicted in the letter.

"Our government knew then of the possibility of something like the kidnapping," Mihelich said. "But nobody ever heard about it because we were told to keep quiet."

Mihelich said the family was able to send a return letter to Mr. Jenco, 50, who was kidnapped Jan. 8, via what the State Department told him were "intermediaries." In early May, he said, the family received a second reply from Mr. Jenco via the same "intermediaries."

"I am fine," the letter began. "I received your message. You should know that I am a victim of American policy that favors Israel and which forced the detained prisoners in Kuwait to do what they did."

Mr. Jenco went on to implore his family to "press the American government to release the detained prisoners over there because we are very close to being hanged in the case that this term is not met."

Mihelich cited the State Department's role in passing along the letters as proof of his contention that it knows who is holding the hostages. In addition, a senior U.S. official told reporters July 1 that the administration believed that factions of the pro-Iranian radical group Hezbollah

headquartered in the Bekaa Valley and in West Beirut were holding the seven hostages as well as some members of the TWA group.

The families say the State Department has told them it has been unable to pursue negotiations because it is not certain who is holding the men, where they are or whether they are being held together.

"They didn't know a lot of things about the 39 either, but they got them out of there," said Weir, whose husband's captivity last week exceeded the 444 days that U.S. hostages were held in Iran in 1979 and 1980.

Mihelich added: "Our government is hiding behind a screen of not knowing who the kidnapers are. That is totally false."

Islamic Jihad, believed to be a code name for Iranian-supported Islamic fundamentalists in Lebanon, particularly Hezbollah, has claimed responsibility for six of the seven kidnappings. No group has claimed responsibility for Kilburn's apparent abduction.

Levin said he is convinced that at least four other Americans were held with him just outside the ancient Bekaa Valley town of Baalbek, where Islamic extremists and Iranian Revolutionary Guards have headquarters. He said he gave that and other information on his captivity to State Department investigators.

Levin also said that he was forced — along with Mr. Weir and Buckley, he believes — to make propaganda videotapes on July 5, 1984. In the tapes, the three men demanded, under orders from their captors, that the U.S. press Kuwait for the release of the Shiites held there.

Levin said the State Department kept the existence of the tapes secret — even from CNN owner Ted Turner, to whom one of the three tapes was addressed — until Levin's wife, Lucille, told reporters about them several months later.

A State Department spokesman, James P. Callahan, said yesterday that the department is "doing everything possible" to secure the release of the seven. He said the government does not provide details to the families for fear that such disclosures

would "endanger negotiations or the hostages themselves."

Callahan added that the department has assigned a staffer to call the families whenever there are developments.

Asked why the TWA families were called twice a day by a special round-the-clock task force but not the families of the seven, Callahan replied: "There was a large number of people on a hijacked American aircraft where one American had been killed and other death threats had been made."

Initially, Callahan said, the State Department determined that the kidnapers holding the seven and those holding the 39 were not connected. But toward the end of the TWA crisis, he said, "a decision was made at a higher level to try to get all 46 out."

The State Department's telling the families at the last moment that there was hope for the release of all 46 hostages, Callahan added, was not based on "hard evidence" but on "rumors and reports out of Lebanon."

What frustrates the families now, they say, is the government's refusal to negotiate with terrorists, thus precluding attempts to negotiate the release of the 17 Shiites held in Kuwait. They say they do not believe the government's claims that the release of the TWA hostages and the staggered release of Shiite detainees in

Israel were not linked.

"We'd be willing to sacrifice our uncle if we believed it would bring peace to Lebanon," Mihelich said. "But to sacrifice him so that America can show it won't give in to terrorism — after the deal in the TWA thing — that we will not do. We believe the government can come up with a face-saving deal again."

Levin, who said the State Department told his wife not to contact other families during his 11-month imprisonment, added: "If those seven are executed because they are sacrificed to our policy [toward terrorism], don't tell me that isn't an incitement of terrorism."

Jean Sutherland, the wife of Thomas Sutherland, 53, the dean of agriculture at the American University of Beirut, who was kidnapped June 9, said there is little pressure on the government to negotiate the release of the seven because they chose to live and work in Beirut.

"The pressure just isn't there anymore," she said. "We've resigned ourselves to the reality that people who lived and worked in Beirut are treated differently from a plane full of vacationers."

But Mae Mihelich, the sister of Mr. Jenco, said she was determined that Reagan hear her out. "Maybe I'm not a VIP, but I'm an American citizen," she said. "I am the people. I will be heard from."